

How Faithful is the Dialect in *The Help*

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As observed in the study (Mima: 2017), Kathryn Stockett's *The Help* is very curious not only in its story but its English variant used in the story. It is a story about a white girl, Skeeter, fighting against the segregation with the help of the African American maids. The story is about the South in the 1960s and the narration and the speech, of course, are written in the regional and/or social English dialect of the South. This type of literature, so-called dialect literature, in America goes back to Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and there are many works of this kind after him and naturally many studies have appeared and discussed the dialects used in the stories to see how faithfully and skillfully they represent the actual form of the variants. Goto (1993), for example, surveys dialect forms in Twain's works and lists them up with observations, and there are similar studies on the dialect representation in literature as seen in Williamson (1971), for example.

The phonological aspects of the dialect in *The Help*, that is eye dialect, was discussed in my study above. In the following, the grammatically and syntactically different forms from the standard English that appear in the same book will be surveyed and discussed to see how faithfully they represent the actual variety of the Southern English and/or the African American Vernacular English (AAVE).

In reading, what strikes the readers first may be the phrase "be fixing to". This has come to be known so widely that readers will easily notice and recognize the speech is being spoken by a person in the South and this makes the book appear more natural. Another feature to be noticed is the frequently occurring double or multiple negations. They are not necessarily limited to the AAVE speakers but are often mentioned as an AAVE feature. These two

help the readers feel the “southern” atmosphere linguistically.

Of many other non-standard usages, to be noted next is the non-standard forms. The past tense of an irregular verb is often changed to the form of a regular verb as follows:

grew > grewed

threw > throwed

knew > knowed

In a sense, it is a leveling of the irregular forms to regular forms and English language has seen this leveling process in its long history. Instead of an irregular past of ‘grew’, the regular ending that indicates the past tense, ‘-ed’, is suffixed to the verb and this phenomenon is often seen in the speech of “uneducated” people. The same is also pointed out by Goto (p. 222ff). There is, however, a process that goes in the opposite direction, too, that is, a past form of a regular verb becomes that of irregular verb: ‘dragged’ > ‘drug’. Since the form ‘drug’ as the past form is listed as non-standard in the dictionary (for example, Seto et al.: 2012, p. 620), this must be a “popular” form in a sense. There are also past tense forms for past participle as in “... have never stole” and “the slow-wrote ones”. Similar but a little different is the form ‘swolled’ (“Her face is pink and swolled up in the sun.”). The latter instance is not simple, however. The expected form should be ‘swelled’, the past form of a regular verb, but the regular past suffix ‘-ed’ is affixed to the stem ‘swoll’ here, a form whose past participle suffix ‘-en’ is deleted from the past participle of the verb ‘swell’, i.e., ‘swollen’.

Another curious usage, aside from the irregular forms, is ‘wait on’, which is equivalent to ‘wait for’ in the standard English usage. DARE states: “In contexts where *for* would be expected: a. in phr. *wait on*: To wait for (someone or something). Widespread, but more freq. Sth. Midl.” (Cassidy: 1996) Thus, this usage represents that of Southern and Midland English very faithfully.

As to irregular forms, noun is no exception, either. Many non-standard forms occur in *The Help*. They are, however, not the forms unique to the Southern English or AAVE and they occur in other variants: ‘womens’

'colored mens', and 'our feets', Another instance is 'policemans'. This is built differently. 'Policeman' is regarded as a regular noun and a plural suffix '-s' is added with the Umlaut nature of the 'man' in the compound noun being ignored. These are built by adding a regular plural suffix '-s' to the Umlaut plural form, 'men' for example. These so-called double plural forms are often referred to as a feature of AAVE, but they are often observed in the speech of the "uneducated people", too.

The possessive form of personal pronoun sometimes appears in a different form: 'they mamas'. The subject form 'they' is used for the possessive as 'their'. The possessive case of a noun is also indicated just by a word order without a possessive ending '-s' ('my husband cousin'), but of course there also occur regular constructions like "Her and Mister Leefolt's room". There are also non-standard forms for reflexive pronoun: 'theyselves' for 'themselves' and 'hissself' for 'himself'. Furthermore, there are non-standard constructions as "them babies" and "this here old broom". They may appear very unique at first sight but they are often seen in other variants, too, and are sometimes used to represent the speech of country people in general.

We need to mention "double subject" usage. It refers to the construction of "a noun (in the subject case) + its personal pronoun (in the subject case) + predicate". The following example will illustrate: "Miss Leefolt, she don't ..." This is curious, but just as Goto (p. 168 ff.) mentions about the Mark Twain's usage, this construction occurs very often in *The Help*. It may not be restricted to the Southern English or AAVE and is seen elsewhere and is used to connote the country speech. It is surely one of the features of these dialects.

In the study of the Southern English and especially AAVE, be-verb is always a main subject. In *The Help*, it is used in following three ways:

(1) Presence of non-standard finite forms for be-verb

"Tell him I's doing fine."

"Is you one a them peoples?"

"... they was five or six."

“But it weren’t too long.”

“... me and that dress is not on good terms.”

“Is we fools to fuel some relief?”

(2) Presence of “be” form of be-verb

“Her face be the same shape as that red devil.”

“... her whole body be so full a sharp knobs and corners.”

“Her and Mister Leefolt’s room in the back be a fair size, but Baby

Girl’s room be tiny.”

“He got on a brown suit and a brown hat, be about my age.”

“Ugly be a hurtful, mean person.”

(3) Absence of be-verb

“She not just frowning all the time.”

“She lanky as a fourteen-year-old boy.”

“By the time she a year old, Mae Moble following me around
everywhere I go.”

“This woman talk like she from so deep in the country.”

“I come over to the windows where she standing. The sprinkler be
blooming up into the treetops.”

It’s late and we so tired.

The type (1) shows there is a be-verb but the subject and the be-verb form do not agree. It cannot be generalized too much but as far as the instances in *The Help* are concerned, there is a tendency for all the be-verb forms in the present tense to be reduced to one form, ‘is’, as ‘I’, ‘you’, ‘we’ and a plural noun phrase are all followed by ‘is’. As to the past tense form, the singular ‘was’ and the plural ‘were’ follow the plural subject (‘they’) and the singular subject (‘it’) respectively.

The type (2) is often called “habitual be” and is characterized as indicating “habitual occurrence” (McArthur:1992,154). However, the instances above do not seem to indicate such constant and continual state or repeated actions. For example, in “her and Mister Leefolt’s room in the back be a fair size, but Baby Girl’s room be tiny”, the size of the room is merely indicated without specially referring to their continual state. So, this usage here is curious and

does not agree with what is usually considered as a typical AAVE feature.

When AAVE is under discussion, the habitual be and absence of be-verb are often contrasted and it is always said that while the former refers to repeated action or constant state while the latter stresses the action or state in progress right at the moment of the speech. Just as the type (2) above, the instances of the type (3) do not necessarily denote the action or state in progress, and they rather seem to be the forms whose be-verb forms are merely omitted. Since the absence of the be-verbs here does not have any significant difference in meaning, it may be thought to be the writer's attempt at showing they are colloquial speech forms, for be-verbs usually receive weak or no stress, thus are weakened or disappear. Perhaps the presence of 'be' and absence of finite be-verb forms should be studied as a phonological phenomenon in this case, instead of syntactical problem as is often done. In the same way, the absence of the auxiliary 'have' may be explained as a result of weakening of stress.

As to the non-standard usage of verbs, "done + past participle" construction should also be noted. This occurs very often: "I done raised", or "I done run off". From the viewpoint of the standard English, this is curious but is a well known feature of AAVE. As Tamasi & Antieau (2015:157) says, "The verbal marker *done* is used in AAE (=African American English) to note that an action has been completed," it has the same function as an auxiliary 'have' of the standard English. This is used in the speeches of the maids in the story and is said to represent the African American speakers' variant forms faithfully.

Thus, as the surveyed and discussed above, *The Help* represents the southern speech as well as that of African American speakers. Some are typical southern dialect forms and others are not necessarily limited to the southern speechway. It is, of course, true, that the actual speech is not always in one variant. It is well known that the same one person utters in several dialects, both social and regional. In the story, the writer represents this mixture of the dialects beautifully while representing the regional and social dialects in the speakers.

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論文要旨

キャスリン・ストケット『The Help』における方言

三間 晶生

方言文学では様々な形で、その当該の方言を表そうとする。方言の音声を表すために、視覚方言を使うのもよく知られたものの一つである。一方で、文法にも方言に特徴的なものがあるのも事実である。本論では、Kathryn Stockett の小説 The Help を使い、アメリカ南部英語方言及びアフリカ系アメリカ人の英語がどのように書きことばにおいて表されているか、またそれらがどれほど実際の方言を忠実に表しているかを調査した。同一人物が常に一つの方言だけで生活しているわけではなく、地域方言、社会方言を使い分けているのはよく知られていることである。小説の中でも、それぞれの登場人物に方言を使い分けさせ、また同時に南部およびアフリカ系アメリカ人的方言を話させていることを確認した。